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Article

Published online on 25 October 2011

Iraq: Reaction to US Withdrawal Plans [REDACTED]

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OFFICE OF IRAQ ANALYSIS

Most Iraqi leaders publicly welcomed the US decision to withdraw forces this year. However, the reactions split along sectarian lines about the implications of the withdrawal. In a press conference on 22 October, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki touted the announcement as a victory for both sides, and he calculates it will strengthen his image as a defender of Iraqi sovereignty.

- Maliki stressed future US-Iraqi relations will center on economic, agricultural, and scientific affairs under the Strategic Framework Agreement. He expressed confidence that Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) can maintain security but said the Iraqi Government will consider seeking military trainers after the US withdrawal. [REDACTED]

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Kurdish and Sunni leaders are worried about a return to violence and a more pervasive Iranian influence after US forces depart. On 23 October Kurdistan Regional Government President Masud Barzani's chief of staff publicly said the withdrawal would have serious implications for Iraqi security. In September Barzani publicly said the ISF was not ready to provide security and predicted civil war in the absence of US forces.

- On 24 October Council of Representatives Speaker Usama al-Nujayfi, a Sunni, opined Iraq's neighbors increasingly will interfere in Iraqi politics if they judge Iraq is militarily weak. [REDACTED] On 22 October an INM spokesman said the withdrawal was a victory for Iraqis but warned about Iran's efforts to exert control in Iraq.
- On 22 October Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadi-Nejad publicly said that the US departure was years overdue and that the Iraqi people never accepted the US presence. Iraq's Sunni neighbors have not yet released

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Article **Iraq: Reaction to US Withdrawal Plans** [redacted]

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any official statements about the withdrawal, but two prominent Saudi- and Emirati-owned newspapers portrayed it as a victory for Iran. [redacted]

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